



Wycombe Wanderers F.C. line up after their championship winning match against Leytonstone. Back row (from left to right) Terry Thomas, Roger Lee (treasurer), Bert Crump (secretary), Jack Smethurst (chairman), Chris Avery, Brian Lee (manager), Ian Rundle, Jock Sheppard (trainer), Dylan Evans, Dave Bullock, Keith Mead, Graham Mackenzie, Keith Searle, John Maskell, Kevin Raine, Bob Hart, Jerry Cox, Terry Reardon, Graham Roberts, Reg. Williams. Front row: Roger Grant, Paul Birdseye, Phil Wood, Tony Horsemann, Steve Perrin, Mick Holfield, John Goldsworthy, Larry Pritchard, John Reardon (assistant manager).

A VINTAGE YEAR FOR WANDERERS

1974 will go down as one of the most successful years in the history of Wycombe Wanderers Football Club. Under the careful guidance of manager Brian Lee, the Blues recorded their third league championship in four years, clinched the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup for the second successive year and finished top of their section in the Premier Midweek Floodlight League. Added to that, the club enjoyed their best ever run in the F.A. Cup reaching the second round for only the third time in their 79 year history (writes Stuart Earp).

Inevitably, the glamour and excitement of the F.A. Cup must be uppermost in the mind when one looks back over the season. But it should not completely overshadow the other triumphs. First and foremost should be the championship success. The Cup lasted six games, the league title was won over 42.

Brian Lee has always maintained the league must be the priority and his dedication has seen Wycombe take the championship in 1971, '72 and now '74.

After finishing fourth in the league last term, the manager had to make changes in personnel if 1974 was to be a success. New players arrived, amongst them Steve Perrin, Keith Mead, Phil Wood, Roger Grant and Terry Reardon and these soon knitted in to produce the perfect blend. Wanderers were ideally balanced towards attacking football. Strength at the back, invention in midfield and above all goal power and penetration in attack. Not only that, it was the way Wycombe played football this year that made them so successful.

Total dedication to attacking football, whether home or away, was one of the keys, although at times it cost them a point or two. A tremendous understanding between the players was another. The way Wycombe strung their passes together was

at times incredible in their accuracy and the sheer speed of their game resulted in several handsome victories by five goals or more. Only Hendon, in the early stages of the season, could match them for ability.

Wycombe, of course, were helped greatly by the new sponsorship scheme introduced by Rothmans at the start of the season. The accent on clean, attacking football was tailor-made for their game and it is no real surprise that they have emerged with more cash than any other club.

Just to recap on their financial achievements this season, they have won £1,000 for winning the league, £440 for 11 three-clear-goal victories and about £200 from the sportsmanship pool. Hendon (second) received £500 and Stortford £300 for finishing third. Stortford also won £440 on the goal bonus scheme. Hitchin were the only side to retain all eight sportsmanship points while Leatherhead will receive the award (£300) for the top goalscorers outside the first three.

Added to the £1,640, the Blues were also presented with the Isthmian League trophy, the championship flag and plaques for the players. It is good to see a club receiving something for a season's toil at last.

This review would not be complete without recalling some of the memories of the F.A. Cup. The qualifying rounds were completed with real efficiency, Tilbury, Woking, Chatham (7-0) and Worthing all being defeated without a goal conceded. Then came the news everyone in High Wycombe wanted to hear, a draw in the first round against a professional club, Wycombe Wanderers v Newport County.

One can't help feeling a tinge of regret for the Welshmen. They were on a hiding to nothing when they arrived somewhat unprepared at Loakes Park and went away well and truly beaten 3-1. Steve Perrin scoring twice and Dylan Evans once. Who was to be next for the "Giant-killers" as the National Press dubbed the Blues amidst a wealth of publicity?

My telephone didn't stop

ringing the following Monday as Wycombe fans excitedly enquired about the second round draw. It was Peterborough United, managed by Noel Cantwell, and pressing for honours in Division Four. This time, however, the professionals had trained well for the game and ran out winners 3-1. Larry Pritchard scoring a memorable goal for Wycombe to equalise at 1-1. The Cup run was over but had given thousands (17,000 for the first and second round games) immense enjoyment.

There was, of course, still the Amateur Cup to come and after a couple of rounds, Wycombe were fast becoming favourites. Hornchurch were beaten 5-0 in the first and then came the away draw to Evenwood Town. This presented more problems to the club as they were unable to travel the 250 miles for the game the day before owing to the three-day week.

They overcame their difficulties by flying up North by plane. The match was won 3-0 with about 500 supporters making the trip to cheer their club. If

Wanderers thought their travelling was over, they were in for a shock, for in the third round they were paired away to Blyth Spartans, the Northern League champions. They took to the air again but this time were pipped 2-1 with Keith Mead own goal tragically deciding the outcome. Wanderers were shattered. But they overcame their disappointment and got down to the task in hand — the Rothmans Isthmian League title.

There were some memorable triumphs in the campaign, notably towards the end. Who will forget the 94th minute winner by Perrin against Ilford or the standard of football in the title-clinching 3-0 triumph over Leytonstone.

Wanderers, of course, needed help to halt the Bishop's Stortford juggernaut which threatened to sweep all before them. They faltered at Hendon, however, and did extremely well to stay the course. Owing to the floodlighting ban, the Herts club were playing three matches a week and did immensely well to take three cups this year, in-

cluding the final Amateur Cup competition.

Stortford, in fact, were one of the clubs Brian Lee singled out when I spoke to him last week. He felt they were one of only three teams to have conclusively beaten Wycombe this season, the others being Peterborough and Walton (1-0).

Brian said he was delighted with the season. "The league is the result of 104 months work. It can be an intrusion into private lives and work. But there is a great deal of satisfaction in leading a group of people and achieving something in a way you wanted to."

One of the main reasons behind the success, said Brian was the club atmosphere. "We had a happy club all the time. There were one or two frictions which had to be overcome and one has to remember it was difficult to motivate and keep players interested during the floodlighting ban."

Brian also paid tribute to the club supporters. "I was very impressed by our supporters," he said. "Not only for their support but for the interest and the way they carried around the name of Wycombe Wanderers. It is so important to do that correctly."

Other highlights of the season were the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup triumph over old rivals Slough, 3-1 at Wokingham, while the club also topped Section A of the Premier Midweek Floodlight League. There was also the first Sunday soccer played at Loakes Park which proved successful with increased gates, probably due to the novelty of the experiment.

And so, the supposedly last season for "amateur" footballers is over. But what about next year? Just what will happen?

What we do know is that the Rothmans Isthmian League will be going "open". All the clubs voted for this, but some clubs will still remain amateur, Corinthian Casuals being one of them. Casuals will still be able to play in the league even though they will be amateurs.

The F.A. postponed the change of players' status at their A.G.M. and now they are waiting until September to hold an extraordinary general meeting to amend the rules.

One thing has definitely been agreed. Every club in the Rothmans Isthmian League will be entering the F.A. Challenge Trophy next year. The Amateur Cup, of course, has now been abolished and the England Amateur team is also likely to be axed.

It is now up to the clubs whether they want to sign on players under contract. Some have already started. Barking, Hayes and Enfield have already signed players under contract and will be paying them a set wage, which will be taxed. It is purely up to the clubs if they want to have professional players in their ranks as the league is now open, there is no limit to the amount of players one club can sign. Last season, only two permit men were allowed.

Wycombe have yet to release a statement on their plans for next season. But it seems unlikely that they will want to take on professionals. Brian Lee has stated in the past he would not like former professionals in his team mainly because it would be difficult to motivate them.

In my view, Wanderers will stay very much the way they were this season and like many clubs, will be waiting to see just what changes are made when the F.A. stage their meeting in September.



Wycombe assistant manager John Reardon breaks open the celebration champagne after the Blues had beaten Leytonstone 3-0 to clinch the Rothmans Isthmian League title.